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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0573
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0829
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4539
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2831
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN SHARES ITS VIEWS OF SCO SUMMIT

REF: TASHKENT 639

Classified By: Poloff Steven Prohaska for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A representative from Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Section told us on September 11 that Uzbekistan is pleased with the results of the August SCO summit in Dushanbe. Uzbekistan's main goals for future summits include further security and economic cooperation, particularly with regard to improving conditions in Afghanistan. The official claimed that there had been no official discussions of South Ossetian or Abkhazian independence during the summit, signalled Uzbekistan's continuing distrust of Iran and Tajikistan, and described SCO initiatives to create a joint analysis center and a role for SCO "dialogue partners" somewhere between that of observers and fully-fledged members. By maintaining a dialogue with Uzbekistan on the SCO, we gain another window into the activities of such regional fora and perhaps the opportunity to influence the outcomes of SCO meetings, although Tashkent's calculus of its own interests is not so easily discernible. End summary.

Positive View of Summit Results, No Discussion of South Ossetian or Abkhazian Independence?

¶2. (C) On September 11, Poloff met with Second Secretary Muhammad Rashidov of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Section to discuss Uzbekistan's reaction to the SCO summit in Dushanbe on August ¶28. Rashidov noted that he had participated in the coordination meetings in the run-up to the summit as well as the summit itself. He said that Uzbekistan views the results of the summit favorably, and that the summit serves Uzbekistan's interests in promoting regional stability.

Turning to the Russia-Georgia situation, Rashidov said that SCO members had expressed concern about the situation there and believed it was necessary to solve the issue through diplomatic means based on the six-point plan, as reflected in the SCO's declaration. He claimed that there had been no official discussion of South Ossetian or Abkhazian independence, however.

Increased SCO Role in Afghanistan

¶3. (C) The SCO plans to create a "joint analysis center" intended to prevent and respond to external threats, due to SCO concerns about increasing drug trafficking and transborder crime. He quoted President Karimov's expressions of concern about increasing threats to security and stability in Afghanistan, growing radicalism, and the increased frequency of terrorist attacks there. Rashidov said that Karimov wants the international community to devote more attention to Afghanistan, particularly in the economic and social spheres. The SCO also supports increasing the role of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, and plans to hold a conference on counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and crime. The SCO also has decided to have a meeting of Deputy Foreign Ministers to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. Rashidov did not know, however, when the conference or meeting will take place.

Suspicious of Tajikistan, Shia

¶4. (C) Rashidov denounced Tajikistan for actively calling for a discussion of Iranian membership in the organization. He complained that Tajikistani President Rahmon has repeatedly proposed that the SCO consider Iran's application, but said he was not sure of whether Rahmon brought it up during the summit. Rashidov said that this, as well as the opening of a Shia Cultural Center in Dushanbe in 2003, illustrates Iranian influence in Tajikistan. He then condemned Shia Islam as "radical" and "aggressive." (Comment: The Government of Uzbekistan has repeatedly indicated to us both its strong opposition to Iranian SCO membership and its distrust of Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan's perception that Tajikistan supports Iran's application appears to be yet another source of friction between Tashkent and Dushanbe. End comment.)

Priorities for Future Summits Include Security and Economic Cooperation

¶5. (C) Uzbekistan's primary goals for future SCO summits include making progress on a broad range of security issues including Afghanistan as well as further economic cooperation, Rashidov continued. He noted that Uzbekistan is particularly interested in realizing projects related to transportation, communications, tourism, creating new enterprises, and the development of infrastructure.

¶6. (C) Rashidov described a series of documents the heads of state had signed, including agreements related to joint military exercises and combating the trafficking of weapons, explosives, and ammunition. (Note: He did not, however, comment on whether Uzbekistan would participate in any SCO joint military exercises. End note.) The SCO is planning to conduct a special meeting focused on counternarcotics in the first half of 2009, and the organization is working to develop a strategic program to combat narcotics and precursor materials in Afghanistan. The organization had also discussed further economic cooperation and intensifying cooperation between Ministries of Emergency Situations to respond to natural disasters.

New Group Related to SCO Expansion and "Dialogue Partners"

¶7. (C) Rashidov corroborated press reporting indicating that the SCO is forming a group of experts that will work out rules and procedures for regulating further expansion of the

organization. The SCO also approved a memorandum on the status of "dialogue partners"--with responsibilities and privileges greater than those of observer states but less than those of full members--which could apply to current observer states or to international organizations. Each partner would have the right to participate in selected SCO activities relevant to the partner's mandate, which could include meetings of working groups and technical meetings, he continued. Furthermore, each SCO partner would be able to receive selected SCO documents that have not been deemed "restricted" and would be able to circulate its own materials to the SCO. These SCO partners would not, however, be able to participate in preparation meetings or signing ceremonies for official SCO documents.

Comment:

18. (C) In recent months, several Uzbek officials have shown themselves to be open and enthusiastic in discussions with us on their views of a number of international organizations, including the SCO. Signalling our interest in a dialogue with the Government of Uzbekistan on the SCO not only provides us with an additional window into the activities of this organization, but also might give us the opportunity to shape the outcomes of SCO meetings. Uzbekistan gave us indications earlier that it would work to counter any "anti-Western" initiatives within the framework of the SCO, and so Tashkent may keep our expressed interests in mind during these meetings as long as it wishes to maintain positive relations with the West. Nevertheless, given Uzbekistan's interest in receiving security and economic benefits from this organization, and the GOU's proclivity for opacity, it is difficult to divine where Tashkent sees its own equities or imperatives to strike a balance between competing interests. Any decision to oppose a potential anti-Western policy from a fellow SCO member is unlikely to be disconnected from Uzbekistan's own interests.

19. (C) Despite differences with certain members of the organization, GOU officials have consistently praised the SCO in meetings with us over the past several months. President Karimov's and Rashidov's comments also suggest that Uzbekistan has become increasingly interested in engaging with observer states--India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan--for projects under the auspices of the SCO that have the potential to stimulate economic growth in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's desire for assistance in addressing its security concerns, and perhaps the hope for international prestige associated with an SCO endorsement of Karimov's "6 plus 3" initiative, also appear to be motivating GOU engagement with the SCO.

NORLAND